The Inquirer, September 9, 1950 Emergency edition

THE INQUIRER

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ORGAN OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY
AND FREE RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP.

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WEEK BY WEEK

Religion and World Affairs

This is an emergency Inquirer. Owing to the London printers' dispute we have not been able to go to press as usual. Most London periodicals have been affected. How long the dispute will last no one knows. We can but trust that by the time this emergency sheet reaches our readers the end will be in sight. Only for two weeks during the one hundred and eight years of its life has the Inquirer failed to appear, and that was during the fuel crisis of 1947, when the government ordered all periodicals not to appear. We apologise to our readers for our unusual appearance, and rely as always upon their ready co-operation.

Letters occasionally reach us about the discussion of world affairs in our columns. A few of our readers do not like it.(Usually they are critical of the point of view of the comments.) It is, of course, an issue for religion. It is difficult enough to apply the insights of religion to social structures and the constant tension of world politics. Religion seems to lose much of its perfection when it tries to enter into the daily conflict of power and social interests.The temptation is then to leave these harsh matters and concentrate on what is called personal religion. It appears to be easier to speak direct to the person in terms of individual responsibility and perhaps mystical experience.

But religion would soon decay - decay within itself - if it refused to pass judgments upon social relations, and more particularly, if it refused within all the issues of peace and war, to enter into the conflict and try to choose what it ought to do and say within the struggle itself. Religion may appear to be robbed of its perfection by being involved in the struggle of power, but at least it is trying to give real guidance to men in real situations. Personal religion can so soon become an ivory tower of escapism.

Communist Criticism

But entrance into the struggle places a singular burden upon religion. It must still remain - in spite of being involved - aloof and absolute in its own way. One of the most searching criticisms of the religious life comes from Communist theory. This declares that the voice of the priest or minister is merely the voice of the dominant class in a society. How bitter this criticism is can be seen from current events. The Churches of the West seem only too readily to express the viewpoint of their governments in the language of religion, even when that language is most passionate and sincere. The same is true of the Russian Church. Without demur it accepts the Russian government's viewpoint upon Korea and the Stockholm peace movement. It uses language of moving sincerity but it is all within the context of the point of view of the ruling class. The voice of governments, or for that matter the voice of the people, is not necessarily the voice of God. In the Bible religion is freed entirely from its social context and speaks in terms of absolute command more frequently against conventional power than in support of it. Biblical religion is, indeed, the answer to Communist theory.

There is a realm of perfection from which religion must act, even if that perfection is blurred when taken down into the dusty issues of the market place or to the bitter jibes of the battlefield.

The Virgin Birth Again

Modern Churchmen have by implication recently taken the Archbishop of Canterbury to task for asserting that belief in the Virgin Birth was held by the Anglican Church. The Archbishop evidently felt himself forced into the declaration by a denial of the doctrine by Dr. Wright, a tutor in an Anglican college, at the recent conference of the Modern Churchman's Union. One can imagine the correspondence and protests that poured in upon the Archbishop from Anglo-Catholics and others. What was the Archbishop to do? It is all very well to question his scholarship; that seems easy enough upon the question of the Virgin Birth, and to non-Anglicans upon other matters also not so readily taken up by Modern Churchmen. But the plain fact is that the Virgin Birth is a solemn article of creed believed in by thousands of people who repeat it. What is the Archbishop to do, tell them they are all wrong? Is he to inform them that the most solemn occasion in the Holy Communion service (the service that is still of first importance to most Anglicans) although it rests in supposition upon the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, rests falsely in that matter? It is all very well for people to be impatient of doctrine, but impatience in such a matter demands some degree of logic. To non-Anglicans such logic does not seem to be present in repetition and denial of an article of belief - both at the same time. For some non-Anglicans Modern Churchmen are as hard to understand as, say, the Archbishop.

THE ETHICAL CHALLENGE OF LIBERAL RELIGION

by Stephen H. Fritchman

There are many ways of stating the problem, but it settles down in the long run to the fact that man is the kind of a creature who cannot live happily with a lie, nor with a desertion of duty, nor with the mere enjoyment of animal comforts. The inescapable demand we make of religion is that it helps us to find out the answers to our persistent moral conflicts: conflicts between self-preservation and loyalty to the larger good of our nation and world; conflicts between animal satisfactions which are proper and demanding and the equally great satisfadions of the spirit. A man not only enjoys food and drink, he also enjoys the growth of ideas over the centuries, the cultivation of beauty in all its forms, the sacrifice of immediate pleasures for long-range pleasures, such as those found in the education of our children, or in the arduous service of his country through reform and legislation.

When we find ethics at the heart of religion, as Unitarians do, the problems multiply, the comparison of one set of values with another leads from conflict to conflict, though on qualitatively higher levels, as our experience deepens. There is no easy salvation, no laying down of our burden on the shoulders of a saviour, no acceptance of a creed that will end all intellectual or emotional difficulties. Yet, for all of this being true, there is a splendid joy that comes through the acceptance of our humanity and its challenge to make much of life here on earth. I doubt if religion would have survived as long as it has, were it not that it provides the framework for man's highest satisfactions and unless it echoed his incurable desire to make the most of his energies, his time-span on earth, his talent for human relations in love and work, in study and play, in struggle against stiff odds.

The Unitarian ethic is one which helps man, aided by history and present experience, to find some of the root principles in living which can be counted upon to support the heavy traffic of our everyday spiritual life. Unitarians, for example, say that the vacuum of purposeless living must be filled with worthy goals or it will be filled with the boredom of a thin and colourless culture which

rushes in to fill the unoccupied space in so many millions of lives. Once we know this can happen, we often cease from casting stones at other people's ways of life, and start making our own positive and creatively profitable. Nothing is more expendable than the religion of so many evangelists (of many faiths) which issues prohibitions, proclaims commandments against this sin and that evil, and yet fails to fill in the vacuum thus created with fresh and satisfying experiences.

An ethically centred religion looks for the great and universal similarities in all faiths. For example, the Unitarians rejoice at the Quaker resistance to pageantry in religion as often destructive of the inner light in each man's conscience. Unitarians welcome the strong, impressive integrity of mind found in the Baptist churches, in the seed planted by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. Unitarians are forever grateful for the ruthless scepticism of Robert Ingersoll and John Dietrich, which cleared many minds of much superstition and thoughtless creedalism, and made possible a religion aided by the scientific method, and congenial to a modern naturalistic universe revealed to us by men like Darwin and Einstein.

I know that to some listeners this emphasis upon ethics in religion seems unfamiliar. They wonder if this really is religion. We have forgotten the ethics of Jesus and Socrates and Spinoza in our preoccupation with candles and hymns, with altars and church sanctuaries. . . so that when religion gets out in the open sunlight of the world, where people live, it seems strangely unfamiliar. But the open air and sunlight are where religion belongs - where Hosea and Jeremiah and Tom Paine found it. It is where our Unitarians, where Theodore Parker and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Thoreau found it. These men found it tackling the real evils of life: incorporated greed, pompous egotism, contumacious selfishness, intellectual surrender. Ethical religion reminds us sharply at times that we can suffocate the soul of man with ecclesiastical mummery, as well as with pornographic movies or escapist novels.

NEWS REVIEW

NEWS FROM THE WEST: The newly formed Unitarian Group at Swindon is meeting fortnightly, on Thursdays, beginning on Sep.21, at the Friends' Meeting House. Speakers so far booked include Dr.J.L.McLachlan, Rev. Gordon Stuart, Rev. John Kielty and Rev. G. Randall Jones.

At Bath, the Rev. H.D.Wiard is giving fortnightly lectures, on Wednesdays, on "Modern Philosophers". The Bridgewater Church aims at contributing £20 to the U.C.M. Appeal Fund. Bridport reports many visitors at the summer services. The morning congregation at Cheltenham is studying Ruskin's "Unto this Last", and would apprec - iate the loan of copies. Whilst the Exeter Chapel was closed during August some of the members journeyed to Crediton for the evening service.

Fifty members of the Cirencester Sunday School are spending a week at Weston. Mr. R.E. Goddard is leaving Cirencester at the end of September, having accepted an invitation to become Lay Pastor at Leigh. Cullompton has held a very successful Flower Show, raising nearly £20. On a recent Saturday afternoon, the Ilminster and Yeovil congregations held a joint rally at South Harp, the home of Mr. and Mrs. N.D.Blake; despite dull weather a most enjoyable time was had by all.

The Plymouth Unitarians have received a letter of thanks for the parcel sent to the Hungarian Unitarians. At the Taunton Holiday Fair a United Service was held in a marquee; over 2,000 were present. At the Industries Fair, a stall was placed at the disposal of the churches; books, pamphlets and all kinds of literature, free and for sale, were displayed; calendars of the Unitarian Chapel were supplied to the stall, together with a number of Lindsey Press publications, all for free distribution; and all our literature was taken away very early in the week by interested people. The Minister at Taunton, the

Rev. J.Unsworth, is devoting Sunday morning addresses during September to a consideration of Unitarian beliefs and worship.

NEWS FROM THE SOUTH: Ringwood and its lovely old Meeting House provided delightful surroundings for the Annual Meeting of the Southern Unitarian Association. There was a most encouraging and representative attendance from all our churches, and the President, Mr. R. C. Belben, of Poole, welcomed the new ministers, the Revs. Ernest Penn and Lawrence Redfern and Mr. L.R.McCulloch, into the Association. A challenging and inspiring address by the Rev. Lawrence Redfern was most enthusiastically and gratefully received.Tea was served by kind hospitality of the Ringwood Ladies, in Conway Hall.

There is a lively fellowship between our ministers and regular meetings of the Wessex ministers have been revived. The last meeting took place in the remains of the 13th-century Abbey at Beaulieu.

Poole reports increased congregations and activity. On 18th June the celebration of the Church Anniversay was started; the Anniversary Service was conducted by the Minister, Rev. Ernest Penn, and the special preacher was the President of the G.A., Mr. H.B.Moore.

CORRESPONDENCE

Letters should be addressed to the Editor,"The Inquirer", 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1. They should not in general exceed three to four hundred words in length.

Adopting Children.- In reply to the request from Mr. L. Chandler on page 27 of your issue of the 26th August, I would say that I think the very best way to proceed for anybody who wishes to have a foster child would be to apply to the Lancashire & Cheshire Adoption Council, 5 Cases Street, Liverpool, the Secretary of which is Mrs. D. Tribe, or the Manchester & District Child Adoption Society, c/o The League of Help, 16 Queen Street, Manchester. I think also it will be found that the Education Department at the Town Hall,Manchester,would also be useful people, and of course there may be other similar bodies situated nearer to Newport. I believe there is also the National Adoption Society, Leytonstone, and I feel sure that any of these or similar bodies do not insist on any religious doctrinal stipulation. - A.W.Cowburn,Knutsford.

DUKINFIELD (CHESHIRE): THE OLD CHAPEL SUNDAY SCHOOL

Founded on 10th August,1800, by the Rev. James Hawkes, it is fitting that the 150th anniversary of the institution,which has been so closely associated with the life and development of the neighbourhood, both in religious and civic affairs, should be made the occasion for thanksgiving and rejoicing, and this is to take place on the 16th and 17th September.

Both the Old Chapel and its Sunday school have every reason to be proud of their long history, identified as they have been with some of the outstanding figures in Unitarianism and the cause of both Day and Sunday School education.

OLD CHAPEL SUNDAY SCHOOL
DUKINFIELD.

150th
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS

Saturday, September 16th,1950.

Tea 4.30 p.m. Tickets 2/- each

PUBLIC MEETING
6.30 p.m.

Speakers:
The Mayor of Dukinfield,
Rev. Lawrence Redfern,M.A.,B.D.
and Visiting Ministers.

Sunday, September 17th,1950.

SPECIAL SERVICES
in the Chapel
Morning 10.45 Evening 6.3

Preacher:
Rev. Lawrence Redfern,M.A.,B.D.

AFTERNOON SERVICE
2.45
Address by
Ernest Barlow Esq.,
Town Clerk of Dukinfield.

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